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MEMORIAL EXHIBITION OF THE WORKS OF

MAURICE PRENDERGAST

1895 - 1949

FOREWORD

It is because there will be wide agreement with Mr Michael Middleton's assertion that Adler 'made a mark upon posterity' that the Arts Council decided to arrange this memorial exhibition. And it might be added that he made a mark as well upon more than one of the younger painters who have found their own style during the past decade. Indeed it is a token of his stature that in the short period between his arrival in Scotland in 1940 and his early death at the age of 54 in 1949 he attracted so wide a circle of admirers both among the public and among fellow-artists.

Thanks are due to Mr Charles Aukin, his executor, to Mr Denis Mathews who selected the pictures, and to Mr Michael Middleton who has written the sympathetic appraisal of the artist's work.

PHILIP JAMES

JANKEL ADLER

JANKEL ADLER was born on 26 July 1895, in Lodz – the seventh of ten children. His father, a miller, claimed to be able to trace his ancestry back for 1000 years. It was an Israelite family. Of the influences that moulded Adler's painting, two were especially profound, and the more fundamental was his Jewish descent. His father belonged to no particular sect, but always devoted the early hours of the morning to meditation. Jankel himself studied for the priesthood and continued, to the end of his life, to find strength and consolation in the Talmud. He was a friend of Martin Buber, the Jewish mystic, and it is hard not to believe that Chassidic mysticism, together with the prayer and ritual, fasts and feasts of his early years, did not colour his whole conception of existence. Adler's iron discipline of technique did not always hide the melancholy of his forefathers. As in the work of Chagall, memories of childhood came crowding in – birds and beasts, asses and cows and cats; the kith and kin of the ghetto; figures from the Old Testament.

Adler was 19 when the First World War broke out. He was conscripted into the Russian army, early taken prisoner by the Germans, and put to work on the land. When, in 1918, he returned to Warsaw, his religious beliefs had changed under the pressures of war and he decided to become an artist. For a while he made a little money writing articles for a

small paper, but soon he left for Berlin where he settled down to learn the topography of contemporary art in solitude and extreme poverty. Then he moved again, back to Düsseldorf, where he had lived as a boy, to study for a time under Gustav Wiethüchter at the Barmen School of Arts and Crafts. In 1925 came his first paid commission – a series of frescoes for a planetarium in Düsseldorf.

From the heavy, sombre peasant girls, the milkmaids and washerwomen of Wiethüchter, from Picasso's monumental women shaking the sands of the foreshore in their flight, from Léger's mechanised robots, Adler compounded his own painting. His bearded Rabbis and big-eyed Jewesses existed no longer in space, but played out their heiratic moments of hidden significance against ever more flat and schematic backgrounds. Benches and tables became two-dimensional; conceptual clouds decorated the sky; the shapes made by the shadows of a fold in a piece of material took on an independent existence of their own. In 1928 he was the Gold Medallist of the Alldeutsche Exhibition at Düsseldorf, with his picture *Cats*. After a longish break exploring Spain and Mallorca, he came back to teach at the Academy there. And there it was, overlooking 'the gnarled and dusty crisscross of branches' of the Academy gardens, 'the crippled grey boughs between which we could see the elevated street going up to the Rhine bridge

towards Obercassel' that the second great influence came into his life.

He had already met a number of his contemporaries, among them Ernst and Klee. In 1929 Klee left the Bauhaus at Dessau and came to teach at Düsseldorf. For some time Adler and he had studios on the same floor, and in 1931, Adler has written, they were much together. 'For years' he says, 'Klee had been interested in my technical experiments'. There seems little doubt that this is an inversion of the truth. As Klee revered the autonomy of every component element in his pictures from the ground and the first priming to the final texture of every square inch, so Adler came to impose upon himself the strictest of technical disciplines in the control of his medium. His own brand of expressionism grew further and further away from the violence of earlier Germans and the earthy emotionalism of the Lowlands; more and more animated by a spirit of intellectual research.

They were, I imagine, happy years – certainly productive years. The implications, however, of the Nazi rise to power were not long delayed. The first attack upon him appeared in the *Völkische Beobachter* early in 1933 and soon after, having seen a Jewish friend tied in a sack and thrown into the river, Adler left the Rhineland and Germany for good. He was one of the degenerates. His pictures in the National Gallery in Berlin, at Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Cologne, Crefeld, Saarbrücken, Mannheim, and

Essen, were relegated to the bonfires and the cellars, where in all probability most of them perished ten years later.

He arrived, penniless once more, in Paris – much affected by events and unable to work. 'When the present war for the painter' he wrote in 1942, 'has begun in 1933, he has perhaps a different view from those whose war began in 1939'. Throughout the remainder of the 'thirties he was on the move. The Polish Government repatriated his larger canvases from Düsseldorf, and in 1935 he returned to Warsaw for a retrospective exhibition. Then Italy, the Balkans, Soviet Russia, and Paris once more, where he worked for a time in S. W. Hayter's *Atelier 17*. (During this period a doctor friend, who called upon him in bed when the painter was ill, found upon the walls, as he thought, an abstract decoration of metal sheets cut from the sides of biscuit tins. They were to keep the rats at bay.) Finally, Adler gravitated to Cagnes-sur-Mer and it was from here, when war broke out, that he volunteered for the Polish Army in France. In 1940 he was evacuated to Scotland. In January 1941, at the age of 45, the military authorities discharged him. He was almost entirely unknown in this country, and set to work with a furious determination. 'For the painter' he said, 'the bagpipe sounds are a new colour to his palette. The Hebridean songs and the songs of the Highlands are a doorway to a new space.'

For Jankel Adler, the problem facing his generation was one of synthesis and reintegration. 'Klee has had the courage' he wrote, 'to walk this clean-swept platform of the twentieth century and not to continue in the shades of Renaissance standards. He did not try to make a new shadow. He made a survey of this place for others who will come.' And then again he wrote, 'Picasso, the great innovator of the twentieth century, has knocked on the door of every painter's studio in the world. The richness of his form gives a totality from which to build the scaffolding of a new painting.' This was Adler's final aim: to catch the vigour and bigness of Picasso, the *scale* of his bold, invented forms, and express them with the perfection, the intimacy, the musical finesse of Klee; to transfer, contrariwise, to epic proportions the latter's awe and delight in his medium. Taxed with standing midway between Picasso and Klee, Adler once replied, 'A very good place to stand'.

Adler's own later paintings are highly organised and their surface extraordinarily refined. He took time and care in preparing the ground (often gluing prepared canvas to cardboard or plywood). He glazed it, dribbled gesso over it, mixed sand with his pigment, and mixed his oil paints with tempera and secret preparations of his own. He experimented, too, with kinds of transfer drawings which, on occasions, gave his line

something of the authority of a print. He spent a great deal of time on all this preliminary preparation, until he was crystal clear as to his own intentions. The final painting, or drawing, was then executed at speed, with all the immediacy of spontaneous creation.

His subject matter became increasingly subordinated to the organisation of the picture surface. It seldom however, became completely non-figurative. 'Abstract painting' he wrote to another artist, 'can very easily become ornamental. So it is always a good thing to have in mind a realistic *point de départ*. I believe that every painter, when he paints, must believe that what he does is reality. I hope you understand what I mean by that. This reality is a guide by which the painter may avoid losing himself in ornamental play.'

Adler's weakness was the hypnotic fascination that technical tricks and the whole *cuisine* of painting held for him. To many, his extreme sophistication was suspect. Superficially, his later paintings consist of planes and shapes held together by a strong wire-like structure of black or white lines that recalls the Picassos of the early 'thirties and the etchings of S. W. Hayter. Everything interlocks to produce a full orchestration of colour – Indian reds and musty pinks; squashed blackberry, parchment whites, and grey-greens like water in an old bottle; sudden flash of fire or promise of a

matchless blue. Often the surface is such that one desires to caress it with the finger tips. It is not hard to write such paintings off as *objets d'art*.

Yet, as one becomes familiar with the language in which they are written, the best of Adler's paintings are seen differently, like those puzzles where the fourteen cubes one has been watching have suddenly become fifteen. M. Paul Fierens has written:'To express anxiety, physical and spiritual anguish in the most solid and stable construction; to bring life into abstraction – an abstraction infused with eloquence, with the convincing strength of tangible reality, of things seen: herein lies the main success of Jankel Adler, herein his claim to our respect and gratitude.' In these heiratic figures of Adler's I sense something of the same concern for the human soul that informs the ikon paintings and fifth-century bodisattvas that were among the reproductions he kept in his studio. Humanity and the human spirit were all important to him. 'When a painter comes to a foreign country,' he wrote in Scotland, 'the first thing he does is to lift his eyes to the sky. He sees it is a sky with clouds. People pass him and they have faces and eyes, the women have breasts and hips. The painter says: I am at home. Curiosity' he goes on, 'is the dynamic force of every creative worker. The child continues in the man. The painter is curious to know what goes on behind the eyes of those people, what is behind the thoughts

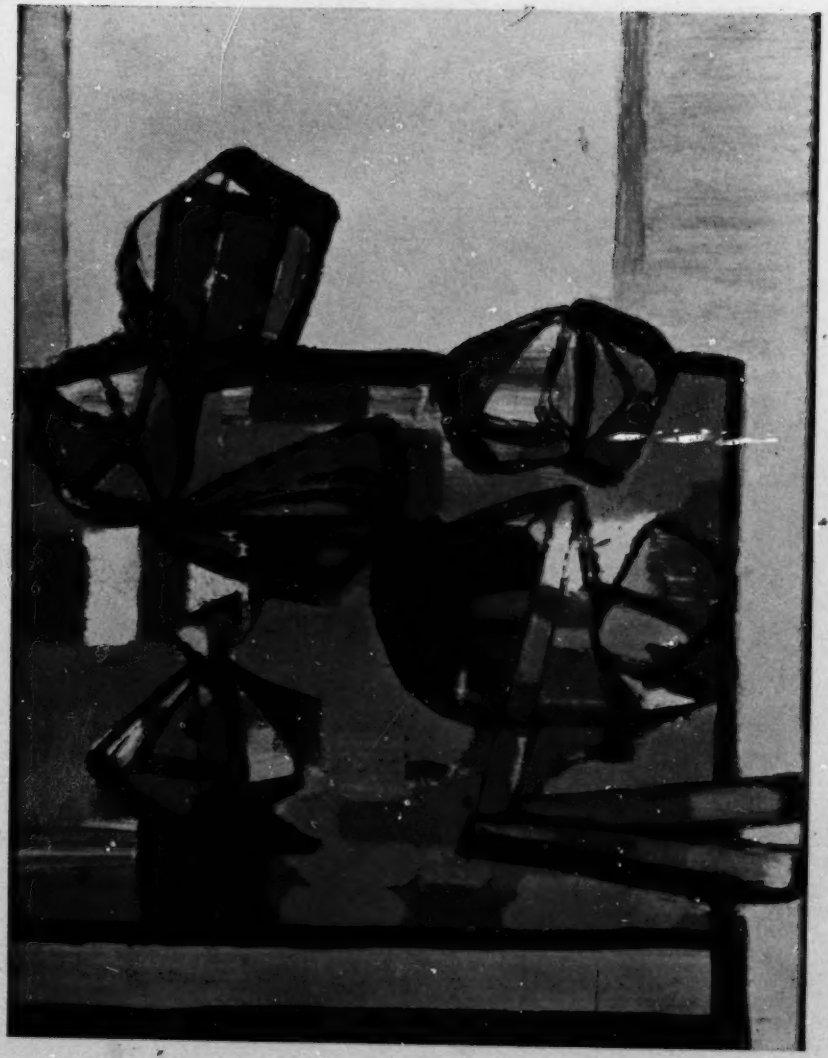
they have.' It was largely this effort to bring the human figure within a post-cubist, post-expressionist framework, that proved so fruitful to a younger generation of British painters cut off by the war.

The effort did not invariably succeed. There is evidence of unresolved dichotomies in Adler's character in those curious canvases that are divided into self-contained panels, and which include expressionistic and abstract figures alongside one another (due, it may be, to the Jewish taboo on the making of images and a sense of himself, the artist, as observer). Nevertheless Adler had a sense of direction and complete conviction in the rightness of the direction. That conviction gives to his best work a reflective eloquence that is neither forced nor borrowed. He was, I believe, a genuine builder, genuinely seeking to create a new synthesis; genuinely *employing* the idioms of his immediate predecessors, and not merely copying them.

I cannot claim to have known him intimately or for long, but I was always struck by the authority and serenity of Jankel's personality, at once tremendously alert and calm. Notwithstanding momentary explosions of anger and periods of frustration and grief, he was remarkably unembittered by the many trials of his life. To the end he had sometimes to pay the greengrocer with a drawing; to the end he remained an exile without a passport. I believe, however, that he made a mark upon posterity.

MICHAEL MIDDLETON

1
THE IRISH GIRL
1944 (No.23)



2
BLUE ABSTRACT
c. 1947 (No.39)

3
PORTRAIT OF A GIRL IN GREY
1948 (No.45)

4
SEATED NUDE
AGAINST AN ORANGE ROBE
(No.74)

CHRONOLOGY

1895 Born 26 July, Tuszyn, Poland, a suburb of Lodz. Educated at religious schools in Lodz and, when his family moved there, in Warsaw.

1909 Sent to live with a married sister in the Rhineland. Attended a private school (Hilger's) at Barmen, and studied drawing in the afternoons.

1911 Attended the Düsseldorf Academy until the outbreak of war.

1914 Conscripted into the Russian army. Captured by the Germans, worked on the land as a civil prisoner, and subsequently allowed to continue his studies.

1918 Returned to Warsaw. Exhibitions in Lodz and Warsaw.

1920 Moved to Berlin and then Düsseldorf.

1924 Visited Paris.

1925 Commissioned to undertake frescoes for a planetarium in Düsseldorf (later destroyed by Nazis).

1928 Awarded Gold Medal by City of Düsseldorf at the Alldeutsche Exhibition.

1929 Lived in Mallorca.

1930 Travelled in Spain.

1931 Returned to Düsseldorf. Taught at the Düsseldorf Academy. Saw much of Paul Klee.

1933. Fled to Paris from Germany in May.

1935 Retrospective exhibition in Warsaw.

1935–7 Travelled in Italy, Yugoslavia, Czechoslavakia, Rumania, and the U.S.S.R.

1937 Returned to France. Worked in *Atelier 17* in Paris. Moved to Cagnes-sur-Mer.

1939 Volunteered for Polish Army in France.

1940 Escaped to Britain in June. Sent to Scotland with Polish artillery. Stationed near Glasgow.

1941 Released from army on medical grounds in January. Exhibition in Glasgow. Lived at Kircudbright.

1943 Came to London in June. Exhibited at Redfern Gallery.

1946 Exhibited at Lefevre Gallery; Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels.

1947 Exhibited at Gimpels Fils; with 'the London School' at the Waddington Galleries, Dublin, and at Galerie de France, Paris.

1948 Exhibited at Gimpels Fils and Knoedler Galleries, New York.

1949 Died 25 April at Aldbourne, Wilts.

Paintings by Jankel Adler have been acquired by the National-gallerie, Berlin; Museum of Western Art, Moscow; Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Contemporary Art Society; museums at Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, Warsaw, and many others in Poland and the Rhineland.

CATALOGUE

OILS

1 STILL LIFE WITH PIPE, 1928
18×24in
Lent by Karl Selig, Esq

2 NUDE WOMAN WITH A BOW, 1929
14×10in
Lent by Alexander Margulies, Esq

3 HEAD OF A MAN, 1936
25×20in
Lent by Miss Ruth Bridburg

4 THE COCK, *c.*1937
38¾×31½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

5 ADAM AND EVE, 1937
55×37in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

6 HEAD, 1937
21½×17in
Lent by L. I. Aukin, Esq

7 FIGURE WITH SHAWL, 1937
24×20in
Lent by Mrs Carras

8 STILL LIFE
25×20in
Lent by the Council of the Ben Uri Gallery

9 THE BLUE GIRL, 1940
12×9½in
Lent by Alexander Margulies, Esq

10 WOMAN WITH HAT, 1940
12×9½in
Lent by Alexander Margulies, Esq

11 FIGURE WITH RED SLEEVES, 1940
12×9½in
Lent by Alexander Margulies, Esq

12 STILL LIFE WITH RED TABLE, 1940
9½×12in
Lent by Alexander Margulies, Esq

13 BEARDED MAN, 1940
12×9½in
Lent by Alexander Margulies, Esq

14 UNCLE MOSHE, 1940
12×9½in
Lent by Alexander Margulies, Esq

15 TWO PEASANT FIGURES, 1941
24¾×22in
Lent by Eric Estorick, Esq

16 HEAD OF A GIRL, *c.*1941
7½×9¼in
Lent by Mrs Charles Aukin

17 THE PRIEST, 1942
44×34in
Lent by Alexander Margulies, Esq

18 THE NECKLACE, 1942
44×34in
Lent by Miss Betty Simpson

19 WOMAN IN A ROOM, 1943
45×35in
Lent by Mrs Capes

20 THE MUTILATED, 1943
44×34in
Lent by J. Bomford, Esq

21 SEATED WOMAN, 1943
44×34in
Lent by J. Bomford, Esq

22 DESTRUCTION, 1943
44×34in
Lent by Benjamin Creme, Esq

23 THE IRISH GIRL, 1944
36×28in
Lent by Mrs H. Craps

24 THE POET, 1944
43×33in
Lent by the Contemporary Art Society

25 GIRL WITH CAT, 1944
43×33in
Lent by the Contemporary Art Society

26 TWO FIGURES, 1944
43½×33½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

27 COMPOSITION, 1944
43½×33in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

28 OLD MAN LOOKS INTO A ROOM, 1944
33½×43½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

29 WOMAN WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS, 1945
43½×33in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

30 WHITE STILL LIFE, 1945
23½×19½in
Lent by C. R. Churchill, Esq

31 COMPOSITION, 1946
12×9½in
Lent by J. Bomford, Esq

32 RECLINING FIGURE, 1946
12×9½in
Lent by J. Bomford, Esq

33 MACABRE, 1946
12×9½in
Lent by J. Bomford, Esq

34 FEMALE NUDE, 1946
12×9½in
Lent by J. Bomford, Esq

35 COMPOSITION, 1946
12×9½in
Lent by J. Bomford, Esq

36 SEATED NUDE ON A GREY GROUND
24½×20½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

37 COMPOSITION, *c.* 1947
24×19in
Lent by Howard Bliss, Esq

38 STILL LIFE WITH A FISH, *c.* 1947
29½×24½in
Lent by the Leicester Galleries

39 BLUE ABSTRACT, *c.* 1947
25×20in
Lent by Mrs Corp

40 BLUE STILL LIFE, 1947
29½×24½in
Lent by Miss Nova Pilbeam

41 THE SAILOR, *c.* 1947
24½×20in
Lent by Gimpel Fils

42 WOMAN WITH A RED DRESS, 1948
25×29½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

43 STILL LIFE WITH FLAME, 1948
51×26in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

44 NUDE ON YELLOW CHAIR WITH STILL LIFE, 1948
25×20in
Lent by Gimpel Fils

45 PORTRAIT OF A GIRL IN GREY, 1948
25×20in
Lent by Gimpel Fils

46 VERTICAL FIGURE, 1948
30×20in
Lent by Gimpel Fils

47 VERTICAL STILL LIFE, 1948
30×20in
Lent by Gimpel Fils

48 STILL LIFE, 1948
39×38in
Lent by Gimpel Fils

49 GIRL PLAYING WITH AN OBJECT, 1948
24¼×22in
Lent by Eric Estorick, Esq

50 FIGURE WITH BLUE BACKGROUND, 1948
25×20½in
Lent by J. Bomford, Esq

51 TREMBLINKA, 1948
60×36in
Lent by Gimpel Fils

52 MAN IN MEDITATION, 1949
43×29in
Lent by Dr M. L. Lederman

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53 SOLDIER AT HIS MEAL, 1929
Etching 19×15in
Lent by Charles Aukin, Esq

54 WOMAN WITH A CAT, 1929
Etching 19×16in
Lent by Charles Aukin, Esq

55 NUDE
9×12½in
Lent by Mrs A. Margulies

56 SEATED NUDE
20½×13½in
Lent by Howard Bliss, Esq

57 MARY
10×14in
Lent by Miss Suzanne Crayson

58 FIGURE SEATED ON A ROCK
23½×18½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

59 NUDE
14×8½in
Lent by Mrs H. Craps

60 SEATED FIGURES
9⅞×6½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

61 STANDING FIGURE
19⅜×13⅜in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

62 RITUAL
9×7½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

63 THE TORTURE
9¾×7¾in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

64 SEATED NUDE
10⅝×4¼in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

65 PORTRAIT
19×15in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

66 GIRL WITH A HAT
17×14in
Lent by Mrs H. Craps

67 AN ILLUSTRATION TO KAFKA
16×12½in
Lent by Lady Sturges

68 AN ILLUSTRATION TO KAFKA
11½×9½in
Lent by J. W. Freshfield, Esq

69 AN ILLUSTRATION TO KAFKA
11½×9½in
Lent by J. W. Freshfield, Esq

70 GIRL PLAYING
14¼×18in
Lent by C. R. Churchill, Esq

71 COMPOSITION IN BLACK AND GREY
19×14in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

72 COMPOSITION
19×14in
Lent by H.R.H Princess Fahrelnissa Zeid

73 TWO WOMEN'S HEADS
19×14in
Lent by Howard Bliss, Esq

74 SEATED NUDE AGAINST AN ORANGE ROBE
23¼×18¼in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

75 WOMAN WITH A CAT
19×14in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

76 STILL LIFE WITH LAMP
18×14in
Lent by Captain E. Duveen

77 IN COMMEMORATION OF THE POLISH DEAD I
18½×13½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

78 IN COMMEMORATION OF THE POLISH DEAD II
18½×13½in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

79 STUDY FOR TREMBLINKA
19×11⅝in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

80 RECLINING NUDE
18½×14in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

81 FIGURE ON A BLUE GROUND
18⅞×14in
Lent by the Jankel Adler Estate

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